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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NASSAU 000393

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR WBENT

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [OFDP](#) [PGOV](#) [XL](#) [BF](#) [CARICOM](#)

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER POISED TO RAISE PROFILE IN CARICOM

Classified By: Ambassador John D. Rood for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

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1. (C) His intelligence, work ethic, and undisguised ambition have made Bahamian Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell one of the three or four most powerful members of the Perry Christie Government and a person of growing influence in the Caribbean. Currently the vice-chairman in the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), Fred Mitchell represented CARICOM at the CMAG Conference in London in February 2005. In April, Mitchell is in line to assume the position of the rotating Chairman of the "Council for Foreign and Community Relations" (COFCOR) within CARICOM. Fred Mitchell is a Bahamian and a black nationalist. The public Fred Mitchell is polished, sophisticated, and smooth and with a skilled attorney's ability to make commitments that commit to nothing. Mitchell's personalistic, close to the vest operating style frequently leaves his own Ministry in the dark about his motives, policies, and actions. The Foreign Minister accepts that the Bahamas is located next to the world's superpower while constantly seeking, in small ways, to play a mini-balance of power game to try to expand The Bahamas' foreign policy options. Mitchell uses international organizations for added leverage as do all small powers, as well as working bilaterally. Mitchell has been particularly unhelpful on issues such as Haiti, Article 98 and a wide variety of U.N. General Assembly votes.  
End Summary.

CARICOM

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2. (C) In April Bahamian Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell will assume the position of the rotating Chairman of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) in Caricom, succeeding Barbadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dame Billie Miller. This body is responsible for determining relations between the Community and international organizations and third states. Whether Mitchell will be able to bend and drive this consensus-driven body in his direction will be one of the Foreign Minister's first tests on a stage larger than The Bahamas. COFCOR (and thereby CARICOM) was unable to come to a consensus following the departure of ex-President Aristide from Haiti, and the bloc would not support or even recognize the Interim Government of Haiti (IGOH) in the ensuing months under the chairmanship of Dame Billie Miller.

3. (C) Mitchell sees CARICOM as a means to an end. The Bahamas would have little to no influence in the international sphere if it did not band with "its Caribbean brothers and sisters". The Bahamas' stance of de facto recognition of the IGOH since the resignation of ex-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide allows The Bahamas to continue repatriating interdicted Haitian migrants while not breaking with CARICOM's formal policy of de jure non-recognition.

4. (C) Minister Mitchell believes that the only time the U.S. pays attention to CARICOM countries is when Washington needs something from the region. Along with other CARICOM countries, the Bahamian government felt left out of communications with regards to the quick departure of ex-President Aristide. He claims to understand the stakes, but refuses to break with CARICOM despite it being in the best interests of his own country. The Bahamas feels the impact of illegal migration each time the stability of Haiti is in flux.

5. (C) Mitchell has a desire to be seen and heard in the international arena. He also currently holds the position of vice-chair in the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG). In January 2005, Mitchell attended a CMAG conference in London to discuss the Commonwealth's disapproval of Pakistan's President retaining the seat of Chief of Army. Mitchell likes playing to make his voice heard in this type of forum.

POLITICAL CAREER

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16. (C) Fred Mitchell decided as a young teenager that he wanted to be a cabinet minister and admits to having calculated every step to achieve this goal. He succeeded just under four decades later. FM Mitchell has been a life-long supporter of the PLP, from his student days through his journalistic days at the Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas (ZNS). (Mitchell once admitted to the DCM that he embarked on a journalist career strictly as a way to gain access to (and model himself after) influential Bahamians.) He joined the Office of the Prime Minister in the Pindling Government in 1980. After a falling out with then-Prime Minister Lynden Pindling in 1992, Mitchell struck a deal with the incoming PM Hubert Ingraham; Mitchell would not contest the Fox Hill constituency if Ingraham would promise him a seat as an independent senator. Over the next five years, Mitchell gradually began his return to the PLP and was eventually forced to resign as an independent in 1997. Shortly after his resignation, Mitchell officially rejoined the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP). Four months later, he was reappointed to the Senate, this time as a member of the PLP Opposition.

17. (C) On May 10, 2002 Fred Mitchell was sworn in as Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Public Service. Since that time, Mitchell has developed a persona of an aloof and humorless, but highly intellectual and respected politician. Oftentimes, Mitchell appears to be in agreement with officials at meetings, and then expresses opposite opinions to the media or in Cabinet. He has aspirations of being an international player and future Prime Minister. Unfortunately, FM Mitchell's further political assent in The Bahamas will be hampered by widespread rumors and tabloid accusations that he is a homosexual. In an outwardly Christian country, Bahamians are extremely homophobic. The fact that Mitchell remains single at the age of 51 appears to support this rumor to the average Bahamian.

18. (C) Mitchell is respected for his intellect, but not particularly well-liked -- even by the current Prime Minister. PM Christie has made snide remarks with reference to the dress and manner of the foreign minister in front of Embassy personnel. Nevertheless, Christie trusts Mitchell, defers to him on all foreign policy matters, and often chooses him to represent The Bahamas at CARICOM Heads of Government Meetings.

#### VIEWS TOWARDS U.S. POLICY

19. (C) Fred Mitchell is extremely knowledgeable about the United States, at ease in the United States, a frequent visitor to the United States, and accepts the reality of the United States. But he probably doesn't "love" the United States. Bahamians inevitably have close ties to the U.S. Like many, FM Mitchell was educated in the U.S., receiving his undergraduate education at Antioch University in Ohio and a Masters in Public Administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Like many colleagues in the PLP, he is most comfortable with, and has the most contact with, liberals. He seeks to differentiate The Bahamas from what he believes is a neo-conservative, militaristic tilt in U.S. foreign policy. China, Cuba, Caricom, even the British Commonwealth are all, in Mitchell's eyes, vehicles that could serve to somehow increase Bahamian freedom of action otherwise constrained by the geological reality of being located less than 50 miles from the United States. During his tenure, FM Mitchell has gained approval to open embassies in both Beijing and Havana. Mitchell thinks of himself as a policy intellectual and strategist on par with players of larger countries in the global arena. In his role as Foreign Minister, Fred Mitchell has been criticized for his excessive travel by the Bahamian public.

110. (C) Mitchell has not been supportive in the promotion of several key U.S. foreign policy goals: the formal recognition and support of the Interim Government of Haiti, the signing of an Article 98 Agreement or a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), and on a litany of U.N. General Assembly votes including the Anti-Israeli Bias and on Human Rights in the Sudan. The Bahamas voted "no action" on several country specific votes, taking the CARICOM stance of "preferring not to name and shame" others. The visiting Israeli Ambassador complained recently that Mitchell equated Israeli policies toward Palestinians with white South African before majority rule.

#### COMMENT

111. (C) In public, FM Mitchell studiously avoids commenting on scandals and making overly-provocative speeches. A pretentious and intellectual man, he prefers to remain above the fray in these situations. The private Fred Mitchell is on display in a website previously titled "Fred Mitchell

Uncensored" and now nominally edited by a third-party and named "Bahamas Uncensored." In Bahamian political circles, it is assumed that the Foreign Minister retains editorial control over the website. Mitchell hides behind the website to make more petulant and more candid commentary than he normally would in public.

ROOD